

Descriptive Writing – Example #3

To explore the big idea of relationships with my students, I constructed a unit on families. I did this because many of my students were from different styles of families, and I felt that this unit, besides teaching the idea of relationships, would also give the students a chance to share their differences in a safe forum. This unit is scheduled at the beginning of the year and I am working with middle schoolers who have a hard time personalizing their information. Since the groundwork was the same for all students, I felt it would give each classmate a chance to get to know each other in a safe way.

After reviewing the idea of a graphic organizer, and using different graphic organizers in a variety of subjects, I presented a folder of graphic organizers to the class. I asked them to consider the use of each organizer as a group. They determined similarities and differences of the organizers and organized their information in a Venn diagram, some in a chart. I gave the students who had more trouble visually the choice of a chart format instead of a Venn diagram so that they would have an easier time participating in their small group. For some of these students I gave a pre-filled in chart so that they could have the necessary vocabulary to work with the group.

After discussing as a class this idea of graphic organizers and their uses, I asked each group to come up with the common dimensions of the organizers, how were they constructed, what made them effective

tools? From that we developed rubric dimensions. I explained that they would be creating a graphic organizer on families and relationships and told them that they would be assessed on four dimensions of their presentation. I had made notes on their group skills as I walked around the room during this discussion. Having given each a task in the group, I also assessed their work in that role, did the notetaker take notes? Did the jargon buster stop inappropriate conversation? I observed with a checklist and planned to use these anecdotal notes in combination with the graphic organizer to assess each student.

After giving adequate time for planning and preparation, some students using their lunch periods if they had after school responsibilities, I assigned each student a presentation time. I told them they would be assessed during the presentation on voice, clarity and engaging the audience. These dimensions were listed on the wall so that students could see the class expectations.

After the presentation, students were given a simple two-word evaluation to finish. What two words would they use to describe the content of the assignment? What had they learned about families and relationships? They used the two word summary to participate in a class discussion regarding families. This conversation was first in groups and then as a whole group. I was pleased to see that students were talking freely about their families and their similarities and differences as a group. Students were finding similarities in each other, despite their family structure being different.

Joseph/eirc 2006

I was pleased to see this interaction and made notes of this initial bonding so that I might restructure learning groups in the future based on these new-found friendship.

I was pleased with the outcome of this project, but in the future I would pre-assign the rubric when I introduced graphic organizer examples in the classroom so that students could build awareness of evaluating their own use of a graphic organizer.